



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Ape Conservation Fund

Recently, the plight of great apes has drawn world-wide attention and given rise to a large and active constituency for their conservation. Once protected by the isolation of densely forested and mostly unexplored habitat, great apes now experience increased pressure from human populations that invade and change their world. Roads built by logging and mining companies furnish hunters and slash-and-burn farmers access to once remote forests. Increasing human populations demand more and more resources from the forest—land for cultivation, valuable tropical timber species, diamonds, gold, and most devastating for forest wildlife, the meat from wild animals (bushmeat). In some areas illegal commercial bushmeat operations focus on apes because their meat is the most prized and brings the highest price in far-flung markets such as capital cities and other large urban centers.

Apes are, by their biological nature, extremely vulnerable species. They have complex social groupings, grow relatively slowly, and have low reproductive

rates. Even relatively low hunting pressure is usually very damaging to ape populations. For example, in 1960, more than 1 million chimpanzees populated the dense forests of Africa. Today, there are fewer than 200,000 and their numbers continue to fall at an alarming rate.

The Great Ape Conservation Act of 2000 (Act), established the Great Ape Conservation Fund (Fund) to assist in the conservation and protection of five groups of primates (chimpanzees, gorillas, bonobos, orangutans, and gibbons). In fiscal year 2001, Congress appropriated \$748,000 to conserve these species.

The Service currently administers several other successful species conservation programs which support on-the-ground efforts to conserve tigers, African and Asian elephants, and rhinoceros. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works to achieve the objectives of the Fund by developing partnerships with natural resource agencies, academic institutions, local community groups, government and

non-government entities, and any other organization committed to partnering for the benefit of the world's remaining great apes in Asia and Africa. Together with our partners, we see clear signs of the effectiveness of our collaboration. This optimism, based on numerous successes in Africa and Asia, helps point the way to increased action in a world of increasing threat.

Parallel to other multinational species conservation programs, the Fund is administered by the Division of International Conservation. A grant program has been developed with a call for proposals and distributed to potential cooperators including regional and range country agencies and organizations. Proposals are sought which directly support and enhance long-term conservation and that include matching or in-kind contributions from other sources. Within this context, the Service invites submission of proposals addressing research, management, conflict resolution, community outreach, education, law enforcement, and local and national capacity building.

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Right:
Western lowland gorilla

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